

ask for your help to request the Government Accountability Office to conduct a study of the impact of the proposed provision to provide Federal pricing authority to the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs. I ask the chairman if he would be willing to request the GAO to conduct such a study.

I yield to Chairman SKELTON.

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman for bringing the issue forward. And I assure the gentleman we do not want to raise the price of drugs for America's veterans and neither do we want to raise the price of drugs for men and women in uniform and their families. I will be pleased to work with the gentleman and my ranking member, Mr. HUNTER, to request that the GAO conduct a study of the impact of Federal pricing on both the Department of Defense as well as the Department of Veterans Affairs and report back to Congress on its findings.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Chairman, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. BUYER. I yield to the gentleman from California.

Mr. HUNTER. Mr. Chairman, I support the chairman and I will support the gentleman's request for a study by the GAO after 1 year to assess the impact to the Department of Veterans Affairs and the DOD of providing Federal pricing to DOD to purchase drugs in a retail pharmacy.

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Mr. BUYER. Reclaiming my time, I want to thank Chairman SKELTON for his support of this quest, and I believe that such a review will help alleviate any uncertainty with regard to this proposal, and I want to also thank Ranking Member HUNTER.

To my good friend, Chairman SKELTON, you and I have had a great history together in this body for the last 15 years, and I consider you a personal friend. I apologize to you for when I let my passion get to the side of me. I am deeply sorry if in any manner you took my words directly personal to you because I would be offended if you felt that way.

You are a genuine human being, and we all recognize that your passion and your support for the men and women who serve in the military is real and, more importantly, it is genuine; and equally, my passion with regard to the men and women in the military and our veterans.

You and I will agree more than we ever disagree, and this is a moment where we may find ourselves in conflict. If I crossed the threshold to my good friend, I deeply apologize to you. I hope you accept my apology.

Mr. SKELTON. Well, it is certainly kind of you to make mention of that, and I appreciate it very much. I thank you for your friendship, of course, through the years. I do agree that we have been good friends and we have worked together so well. So that, of

course, is all behind us. Thank you very much.

I do look forward to working with you and Mr. HUNTER on the issue as we move forward to protect not only our Nation's veterans, but our military personnel as well. And I think we will get there in this matter.

Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART of Florida. Mr. Chairman, I rise on behalf of my colleagues ALCEE L. HASTINGS, ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN and MARIO DIAZ-BALART to introduce an amendment to H.R. 1585, the Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008. The amendment recommends that the Secretary of the Navy establish and maintain a Navy Senior Reserve Officers' Training Corps, ROTC, program at the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida.

Mr. Chairman, the University of Miami is committed to assisting in the education of the armed services officer corps. The university currently houses Army and Air Force ROTC programs with great success. In fact, the university has recently committed to build a new ROTC-only facility should a Navy program be added. This would provide the best environment for college education and officer training for our Armed Forces.

The south Florida community is an ideal place for a Navy ROTC program. The proximity to important military installations such as the Key West Naval Air Station and the United States Southern Command only serves to advance the real world training to which senior reserve officers are exposed during their military education.

Mr. Chairman, a Navy ROTC program at the University of Miami will further the Navy's continued mission to diversify their officer corps through increased recruitment, retention, and career development in minority populations. With a 50 percent minority student body, the university is well-situated to help the Navy achieve its laudable goal. Miami is the "gateway" to the Americas. The diversity of our community and the knowledge of our hemisphere would greatly augment the quality of officer training for our military.

Mr. Chairman, for these and other reasons, I am pleased to introduce this amendment with my colleagues and urge all members to support this important Navy ROTC program at the University of Miami.

Mr. MITCHELL. Mr. Chairman, I rise today in support of an amendment that will help improve the transfer of medical records from the Department of Defense to the Veterans Administration upon a soldier, sailor, airman or marine's discharge.

This amendment will help ensure that when one of our troops voluntarily authorizes the transfer of his or her medical information to the VA, that information will, in fact, be transferred.

Sadly, the safe and efficient transfer of medical records to the VA has been, and continues to be, a persistent problem. Despite numerous attempts to design and implement a system for sharing vital medical information, the DOD and VA have been unable to do so.

This information is essential to the well-being of our veterans. Without it, we cannot ensure that they receive the proper medical care from the VA.

The Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations has held hearings on this issue, and we have heard a myriad of explanations for why this is the case.

According to the Government Accountability Office, one of them is a technical, legal hurdle involving the law that protects the privacy of patients' medical records: the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. According to the GAO, the DOD and VA have differing interpretations of HIPAA, and as a result, HIPAA has become a barrier against the sharing of medical information.

And even worse, the HIPAA hurdle has persisted for years.

In May 2005, the GAO reported,

DOD and VA have been working on a data sharing agreement for over 2 years, but have not reached an agreement. DOD and VA differ in their understanding of HIPAA Privacy Rule provisions that govern the sharing of individually identifiable health data for servicemembers currently receiving that exchange. DOD's and VA's inability to resolve these differences has impeded coming to an agreement on exchanging seriously injured servicemembers' individually identifiable health data.

At the time, the DOD and VA were attempting to draft a memorandum of understanding to enable them to begin sharing medical information. However, according to the GAO, even if they had completed the memorandum of understanding, HIPAA would have remained a barrier. Specifically, the GAO found,

... the draft memorandum restates many of [the legal authorities contained in the I ["HIPAA"] Privacy Rule for the use and [disclosure of individually identifiable health data. As a result, even if the memorandum of understanding is finalized, DOD and VA will still have to agree on what types of individually identifiable health data can be exchanged and when the data can be shared.

This just does not make any sense.

HIPAA is supposed to ensure the privacy of a patient's medical records, not prevent their transfer, at the patient's request, to his or her doctor.

If the DOD and the VA can't recognize this, then I believe it is time for Congress to clarify it for them.

The Mitchell, Space, Walz, Rodriguez Amendment would require the DOD to provide every member of our Armed Forces a HIPAA authorization form, the voluntary signing of which would legally obligate the DOD to transfer that servicemember's medical records to the VA upon his or her discharge.

I want to emphasize that participation in this process would be completely voluntary. No member would be forced to share his or her medical information because of this amendment.

Rather, the amendment would merely ensure that when a servicemember unambiguously authorizes the transfer of his or her medical information to the VA, that information will, in fact, be transferred.

I want to thank House Armed Services Committee Chairman IKE SKELTON for supporting our amendment. His dedication to our fighting men and women is legendary, and our Nation's veterans are lucky to have him on their side.

I also want to thank Representatives ZACH SPACE, TIM WALZ and CIRO RODRIGUEZ. I am proud to serve with them on the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. They have been full partners in this endeavor, and as the subcommittee's chairman, I am grateful.

Finally, I want to thank Chairman FILNER. His leadership has been invaluable, and I am honored to have his support.